

# Scopic Regimes and the Visual Turn in International Relations: Seeing World Politics Through the Drone

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**Abstract:** In this paper, we argue that the lack of attention paid to the scopic regimes of modernity in the visual turn literature misses a key aspect of how visibility produces and shapes the international as both a site—and sight—of politics. In making the case that systemised ways of seeing are central to world politics, we contend that the scopic regimes of modernity help us to understand how it becomes possible for particular representational practices and outputs to resonate within broader discourses as authoritative, truthful, and/or emotively powerful. To do so, we draw from ongoing controversies over targeted killing via drones. We argue that disagreements over the legality and governance of drone warfare are more than disputes over legal statutes and legitimate techniques for the application of kinetic force; they also encompass disagreements over how we see, who we see, what we see, and what counts as being seen. Thus, by demonstrating the importance of scopic regimes, we provide evidence of the value of engaging with how the visual produces the political in international relations. Moreover, we argue for international relations to engage with scopic regimes from beyond western traditions.

**Key words:** scopic regimes; visibility; drones; visual turn

## **Introduction**

What are the scopic regimes of modernity and how can they deepen the 'visual turn' in international relations? Since Martin Jay (1988) identified the importance of scopic regimes to western modernity, the concept has been used in visual studies to account for how practices of seeing, representing, and subject positioning are linked to systems of knowledge and power that shape what can be understood as true. Yet, within the international relations literature in general, and its 'visual turn' more specifically, scopic regimes have not been as analytically prominent. Where scopic regimes have appeared, they have been deployed for the purposes of constructing bespoke regimes on the basis of inductive analyses of particular cases (Aradau and Hill 2013; Amoores and Hall 2010; Coward 2013; Gregory 2012; Masters 2015; Mauer 2016). For example, Power and Campbell (2010), analyse a scopic regime that brings together a set of representational practices to depict Africa in particular ways to audiences. While these are useful contributions, these engagements are not sufficient if the discipline is to deepen its understanding of how visibility produces and shapes the international as both a site—and sight—of politics. We will show the utility of analysing the scopic regimes of modernity, which have been influential in shaping viewing practices in western contexts for over five hundred years, either as paradigmatic models, or as models to be reacted against.

We argue that systematised practices of seeing *are* central to world politics. More specifically, we contend that the scopic regimes of modernity help us to understand how it becomes possible for particular representational practices and outputs to resonate within broader discourses as authoritative, truthful, and/or emotively powerful. To do so, we draw from ongoing controversies surrounding targeted killing via drones. We demonstrate that novel insights into the visual politics of drone warfare arise from being attentive to relations of power produced through the scopic regimes of modernity and alternatives that may challenge them. We contend that central to the production of drone warfare are the asymmetries amongst who controls what is seen, how it is experienced, and by whom it is experienced.

Our specific argument is that drone warfare and targeted killing should be understood, in part, as encompassing forms of combat over 'ways of seeing' (Berger 2008 [1972]; Grayson 2016) that are conditioned by the scopic regimes of modernity. As such, this paper contributes to the study of world politics by showing how the scopic regimes of modernity remain important to forms of political contestation that take place in contemporary visual fields. More specifically, by foregrounding the visual dimensions of drone debates, we establish how these scopic regimes identify broader cultural dynamics that are important to the constitution of world politics. Scopic regimes are thus useful methodologically for capturing how visual fields are produced as well as to conceptually and empirically ground what Jacques Rancière has referred to as the 'politics of aesthetics'. Primarily, the scopic regimes of modernity draw our attention to how ongoing controversies over the legality and governance of drone warfare are much more than disputes over legal statutes and legitimate techniques for the application of kinetic force; rather, they also encompass disagreements over how we see, what we see, who we see, and what counts as being seen.

Like Rose (2007: 5), we believe that '...particular forms of representation produced by scopic regimes are important to understand...because they are intimately bound into social power relations'. However, in doing so, we do not engage with a politics of visual verity where the analyst must distinguish simulations

from the real, or argue that these have collapsed into one another. Whether scopic regimes are dominated by simulations or not is largely irrelevant to our endeavour for two reasons. First, a focus on the scopic regimes of modernity is a concern with how particular fields of vision are constructed such that their representational properties are perceived as truthful--the metaphysics of the depictions are tangential; what matters is if they are generally understood as capturing the 'real'. Second, conflation of simulation with the 'real' are not important when one is concerned with the how scopic regimes and relations of power are mutually imbricated, reproducing asymmetries in the claims about who (or what) can be seen and by whom, where, when, and how. As Jonathan Crary (1992: 9) has stated, 'some of the most pervasive means of producing "realistic" effects in mass visual culture...were in fact based on a radical abstraction and reconstruction of optical experience'. We believe that the forms of observation that are made possible by drone technologies are no different in this regard. Thus, as Lisle (2004: 16) argues, the terrain for critical investigation should not be whether the 'real' is presented in 'raw form', for this is an impossibility. Rather, the imperative is to uncover those discourses, or techniques, or scopic regimes, which persuade us that '...it is actually *possible* to access the real' (Lisle 2004: 16; emphasis in original).

For Nicholas Mirzoeff (2011: 474), analysing this politics of the visual necessitates an engagement with visibility, referring to an imaginary constructed from 'information, images, and ideas'. As a discursive practice with material effects, Mirzoeff (2011: 476) argues that visibility has three operations: 1) naming, categorizing, and defining for the purposes of classifying and making something/someone visible as a particular type; 2) separating for the purposes of social organisation; 3) legitimating the classification through aesthetic practices. We believe that the scopic regimes of modernity help to better understand how practices of classification and separation are made to look correct, but also how observing subjects are acculturated into looking correctly. This involves not only wider distributions of the sensible, but, as will be shown, more specific practices, techniques, and norms used to represent the world in ways that persuade audiences. While Mirzoeff engages with the former, the latter receives less engagement. We argue that scopic regimes help to better understand, paraphrasing Lisle (2004), how (potential) observers believe it is possible to access the real, a question elided by Mirzoeff. Moreover, in contrast to conceptualising visibility as a series of operational steps in a linear process, we believe it is more useful to see the relationship as a recursive feedback loop, subject at any given time to stabilising and destabilising influences.

To show the importance of the scopic regimes of modernity to international relations, this paper is structured as follows. In the first section, we review the existing literature on visibility in international relations. We propose that the scopic regimes of modernity can make a significant contribution to the 'visual turn' in international relations. In the second section, we outline how scopic regimes have been conceptualised in visual studies and how they might benefit the study of international relations. In the third section, we illustrate how the scopic regimes of modernity contribute to an ordering of global space which is operationalised through the drone. In the fourth section, we analyse previous efforts undertaken by offices within the United Nations to unveil drone warfare through technologically enhanced forms of visibility. While well-meaning, they ultimately fail to challenge a core feature of droning that is used to garner legitimacy: a claim to the possibility of visual omniscience. In the fifth section, we explore how the scopic regimes of modernity relate to the art of Mahwish Chishty. Here, we argue that by gesturing to an alternative scopic regime from outside of the west, her work signals ways to disrupt droning's 'distribution of the sensible' (Rancière 2006). We argue that by potentially disrupting the sensory orders of droning, her work is also potentially disruptive to their associated

political orders and the practices that underpin them. Thus, this case study demonstrates how the visual instantiates the political. More precisely, it shows how images, and scopic regimes that render them visible, contribute to the politics of the drone, rather than merely reflecting it. Simultaneously, the comparison also reveals how the predominant scopic regimes of modernity shaping debates over targeted killing miss crucial elements of the visual politics of the drone and that there are other ways of seeing. Thus, it demonstrates the ongoing need to engage with scopic regimes from beyond western traditions. We then conclude by discussing the broader value of scopic regimes for the discipline of international relations.

### **The 'Visual Turn' in International Relations**

International relations as a discipline has been conditioned by an unacknowledged visibility present in key concepts (e.g., *mirror imaging*), methods (e.g., *process tracing*), and a preference for forms of epistemological realism that claim to capture 'reality' in unmediated forms (Bleiker 2001). Yet, it is only in the past two decades that explicit engagement with how visual artefacts and modes of visibility constitute world politics has been undertaken in a sustained manner. This 'visual turn' has encompassed diverse sets of scholarship from meta-theoretical concerns over aesthetics, *mimesis*, and the politics of representation; to methodological concerns over how to best capture the intersections of visual depiction, discourse, and subjectivity; to analytically driven concerns over what work visual practices like photography, chromatics, or cartooning *do* politically to shape the contours of the international (e.g., Agius 2013; Andersen et al 2015; Andersen and Möller 2013; Bleiker 2001, Guillaume et al 2015; Hansen 2011; 2015; Heck and Schlag 2013; Hutchison 2014; Shim and Nabers 2013; van Veeren 2011; 2014; Zevnik 2016). At the same time, underlying this diversity has been a shared interest in how we see the world, what we see in the world, where we see in the world, and how visual representations of the world contribute to the institutions, processes, and dynamics of international relations, however defined.

Across these shared interests, David Campbell (2007: 358-359) provides a useful series of methodological questions that provide a heuristic for forms of visual analysis in order to broaden and deepen understandings of international relations. The first is to ask 'how can visibility be theorized as a specific form of knowledge?' The second is to discover what are '...the implications of a philosophical account of visibility for our understandings of...[visual artefacts] more generally?' The third is to ascertain how artefacts can 'be understood as...technolog[ies] of visibility that establish the conditions of possibility for...[international relations]?' The final question is does a visual artefact as a 'technology of visibility problematize [an element of international relations].....and affect ethical and political responsibility'?

Campbell thus draws attention to the multi-faceted ethico-politics of the visual. He also shows the importance of not limiting analyses to the representational. While representation is certainly important, and as Bleiker (2001) has suggested, the gaps between signifier and signified are pregnant with relations of power, robust accounts of the visual must not only aim to accommodate discursive meanings, semiotic codes, and inter-textual connections. As Campbell (2007) contends, visual analyses in international relations should also seek to understand the basis upon which particular artefacts are invested with truth-telling capabilities, taken as meaningful, and circulated as representational expressions and material objects.

Thus, applying Campbell's questions to the existing literature within international relations opens opportunities to further deepen the contributions that the visual turn makes to understanding world

politics. While the literature demonstrates a willingness to argue that the political shapes the visual, this is most often framed as which discourses contribute to the composition and interpretation of an artefact via inter-textuality (Hansen 2011). Less frequently, the influence of genre and status have been considered, such as the role of iconic images in world politics (Hansen 2015). Mapping these inter-texts is important. However, there has been less exploration of the inverse relationship: that is, how are understandings of the political shaped by the visual? There is an opportunity to go beyond establishing connections to the object of investigation (e.g., what an image *does* politically) to determine the ways of seeing underpinning the identification of a visual field, what makes it possible for an object within the field to be recognised along a given visual register, and how this exposes one kind of politics amongst many other possibilities. This last point speaks to a conceptual and practical frustration that emerges from much of the literature—ultimately findings are reached that images (both in general and in specific cases) are polysemous and complexly ambivalent, reiterating general conclusions reached in visual, media, and cultural studies long ago (e.g., Barthes 1977; Mirzoeff 2006; Mitchell 2005: 9-10). Thus, under what conditions are images understood as not ambivalent? In other words, what must be active to produce a probable, preferred, correct, or even truthful meaning within ‘interpretive communities’ (Guillame et al 2016)? The second opportunity is an underlying assumption in much of the literature that images are ‘texts’ like any other that can be reduced to their semiotic/representative content. This can imply that “the message” being read lies within the visual image, that it is speaking to us and all that we need to do is listen’ rather than consider how these readings themselves are produced through socio-political relations (Banks 2009: 10). But as Campbell suggests, if images are technologies of visibility, it is important to examine how images are produced in two senses. The first is in terms of traditional media studies’ concerns with who (or what) makes and circulates them (Ciuta 2016). The second, and largely neglected, is what allows an image to be recognised as an image, with specific qualities, and a particular kind of status (e.g., as evidence) in a given context. The third opportunity is to move beyond assuming that the ethico-political contestation over images stems only from differences in interpretation over what is being represented—and how—to determining how the ethico-political visual field in which images are embedded is also produced by ways of seeing that are conditioned by the scopic regimes of modernity. Thus, the potential for scopic regimes to enrich the ‘visual turn’ in international relations should be explored further. More specifically, turning to the scopic regimes of modernity can help to map the ethico-political topography of visual fields.

### **Scopic Regimes and the International**

International relations as a discipline has been closely associated with the problematics of western modernity (e.g., Ruggie 1993; Walker 1993; 2010) and its encounters (Geeta and Nair 2003). Visual studies itself has posed that the privileging of sight and particular kinds of seeing were key components in the scientific, economic, and cultural development of western modernity. Martin Jay (1988) identifies three scopic regimes that were prominent ideal types produced through western art from the Renaissance onwards that had wider socio-cultural impact in conditioning relationships between what can be seen and how this is represented visually.

IMAGE 1 ABOUT HERE

At the same time, while Jay (1988: 4) has argued that western modernity has been ocular centric, he is quick to qualify that it ‘...may be best understood as a contested terrain, rather than a harmoniously integrated complex of visual theories and practices’. Thus, the development of the modern international has also been contemporaneous with the contested ocular-centrism of modernity and a confluence of

practices including western imperialism, capitalism, racism, and mechanised war. Yet, the scopic regimes which may be key nodes in these assemblages and that can help to historicize them have not received sustained attention in international relations. This is a puzzling oversight.

The first scopic regime of modernity Jay (1988) identifies is 'Cartesian perspectivalism' in which the ideal gaze was understood to be one that was disembodied, objective, and quantitatively inclined. As Jay (1988: 6) contends, unlike previous scopic regimes in western artistic traditions that had attributed priority to religious significance, Cartesian perspectivalism accorded special attention to spatial relations amongst objects based on a 'geometrically isotropic, rectilinear, abstract, and uniform' conception of space (see image 1). In transposing three dimensional space onto a two dimensional surface, depictions within the frame could be understood as a flat mirror 'radiating out from a [single] viewing eye...looking through a peep hole at the scene in front of it' (Jay 1988: 7). He continued, 'such an eye was, moreover, understood to be static, unblinking, and fixated, rather than dynamic, moving with what later scientists would call "saccadic jumps"...from one focal point to another' (Jay 1988: 7). As noted above, the goal was to attain realism defined as the mimetic transference of 'abstract, quantitatively conceptualised space' onto a canvass such that one 'no longer hermeneutically read the world as a divine text, but rather saw it as situated in a mathematically regular spatio-temporal order filled with natural objects that could only be observed from without by the dispassionate eye of the neutral researcher' (Jay 1988, 7-9).

IMAGE 2 ABOUT HERE

The second prominent scopic regime identified by Jay (1988: 12) is the art of describing, or Baconian empiricism, which '...suppresses narrative and textual reference in favour of description and visual surface...'. It ignores the monocular eye of Cartesian perspectivalism. Instead Baconian empiricism highlights the prior existence of 'a world of objects' extending beyond the frame of the canvass which is indifferent to the viewer's position (Jay 1988: 12). It pays attention to many small things and it is the surfaces of objects that are prioritised in its depictions rather than their positioning (Jay 1988: 12-13). By doing so, Jay (1988: 13; 15) contends that Baconian empiricism is '...content to describe rather than explain' (see image 2). Baconian empiricism thus privileges material surfaces.

The third scopic regime forwarded by Jay (1988: 16) is the Baroque which he describes as 'painterly, soft-focused, multiple, and open... a permanent, if often repressed, visual possibility throughout the entire modern era' (see image 3). By figuratively holding up a mirror to the world that distorts, the Baroque was fascinated by the '...opacity, unreadability, and the indecipherability of the reality it depicts...reveal[ing] the conventional rather than natural quality of "normal" specularity by showing its dependence on the materiality of the medium of reflection' (Jay 1988: 17). In producing a haptic quality to images through reflected distortion, the Baroque recognised the mutually constitutive imbrication of rhetoric and vision (Jay 1988: 17). Thus, in seeking to represent the un-representable, the Baroque produced an unease similar to William Blake's sublime in the presentation of what Christine Buci-Glucksmann (1986) called 'palimpsests of the unseeable' (quoted in Jay 1988: 18-19). Through its surplus of imagery, it challenged the 'monocular geometricization of the Cartesian tradition, with its illusion of three-dimensional space seen with a God's eye view from afar' while rejecting Baconian empiricism's belief in the solidity of surfaces and materials (Jay 1988: 16-17).

Jay's scopic regimes, with their preferred ways of seeing and differing emphases on the organisation of the visual field (i.e., orderly v. descriptive v. open), offer a useful set of tools to investigate the larger

context within which the visual works politically. Although ideal types whose contemporary products may be piecemeal and incorporate contending elements in contradictory ways, they direct attention to how the scopic regimes of modernity are constitutive of visual artefacts and their importance to the viewer for making sense of the visual field in them. Moreover, over time, these scopic regimes have become embedded in, and instantiated through various assemblages (e.g., Fiorani 2005; Grayson 2016).

IMAGE 3 ABOUT HERE

Thus Allen Feldman (1997: 30) argues that scopic regimes provide the means and techniques to:

...prescribe modes of seeing and object visibility and that proscribe or render untenable other modes and objects of perception. A scopic regime is an ensemble of practices and discourses that establish truth claims, typicality, and credibility of visual acts and objects and politically correct modes of seeing.

An awareness of the scopic regimes of modernity not only serves as a reminder that all seeing is mediated. It also suggests the importance of taking visual analysis in international relations beyond a fixation on representation towards a concern with how the viewing subject is being produced and/or assumed within the visual field in order to establish truth claims and 'politically correct modes of seeing'.

To this end, Jonathan Crary (1992) contends that scopic regimes provide more than rules about the ways images appear or visual material is represented through cultural conventions. They also reorganise forms of knowledge and social practices that shape 'the productive, cognitive, and desiring capacities of the human subject' (Crary 1992: 3). Although scopic regimes produce an ideal viewing subject, they also must contend with the challenge of working with observers who for reasons of physiological limitation, personal conviction, political contingency, practices of observation, and/or cultural orientation will necessarily fall short of this ideal. As Crary (1992: 6) contends:

...what determines vision at any given historical moment is not some deep structure, economic base, or world view, but rather the functioning of a collective assemblage of disparate parts on a single social surface. It may even be necessary to consider the observer as a distribution of events located in many different places. There never was or will be a self-present beholder to whom a world is transparently evident. Instead, there are more or less powerful arrangements of forces out of which the capacities of an observer are possible.

Thus, beyond their representational rules and adjudication of truth claims, scopic regimes are an important element in the production of the capacities of the observer to 'see'. How the scopic regimes of modernity function within debates over targeted killing will be shown below. Of particular note is upon who and where are 'powerful arrangements of forces' being applied to produce a particular way of seeing?

### **The View from the Drone**

Having shown how the scopic regimes of modernity function, this section attempts to deal with three questions regarding the visual field of drone warfare. First, what ways of seeing are produced by the practices of drone warfare? Second, what constitutes the gaze that emerges from the drone? Third, what power-relations, sensations, and cultural modes of interpretation give sense to the drone? The focus is

on connections forged amongst predominant scopic regimes and the gaze enabled from the vantage point of the drone.

There is a growing literature on the visibility of aerial views in general, and the drone in particular. Within this literature, the concept of the gaze seeks to capture the relations of power and forms of subjectivity produced through looking—and being looked at. More generally, gazes may be motivated by a desire to look and/or control or be a relationship in which one is caught and thus captured by the object being looked at, much like the myth of Narcissus and the pool. They are contextually specific and may relate to subject positions like the male gaze (Mulvey 1975) or the tourist gaze (Lisle 2004), to more formal institutional arrangements including the colonial gaze (Lutz and Collins 1993). But while frequently used, we argue that caution needs to be exercised with regards to using the gaze with the drone in two senses. First, although some of this literature directly engages with scopic regimes, this is done as a means to stress the novelty or uniqueness of aerial or drone enabled views.<sup>1</sup> We do not think this particularism is helpful when trying to understand how the operator gaze produced through the drone has become so quickly embedded into a politics of truth regarding violence. It is thus important to acknowledge the influence of Cartesian perspectivalism and Baconian empiricism to historicize the gaze from above, and the subject positions that it produces, which remain privileged in the spatial practices underpinning contemporary war. Second, as will be shown below, the surplus of visual imagery produced through drone technologies potential undermines the singular notion of the gaze.<sup>2</sup> However, its continuing analytic utility comes from capturing how operator views from the drone get reduced to a vertical gaze that reconfigures the organisation, management, and control of space, ‘...enfolding human vision into...sophisticated sociotechnical assemblages of targeting’ (Bousquet 2017: 62).

By partaking in what the US Air Force refers to the ‘find, fix, target, track, engage, and assess (F2T2EA) kill chain’, the operator’s gaze enabled by the drone surveys across horizontal, vertical, and temporal planes to instantiate subject positions like non-combatants as well as ‘high-payoff’ and ‘high-value’ targets whose demise can be scheduled, on-call, planned, or unplanned (USAF 2007: 16; Joint Chiefs of Staff 2007: I-7). Those who are identified as targets and those who are within close proximity to identified targets are then subject to forms of control, either directly or indirectly, like intelligence gathering, surveillance, and kinetic force. In turn, to be effective, these modes of control require a capacity to see all that needs to be seen to establish and/or maintain a form of order(er) (Grayson 2012: 124; see also Cosgrove 2001; Kaplan 2006).

Consequences include both a reconfiguration of the battlespace into a landscape of ‘kill boxes’ (ALSA 2005; Chamayou 2015) in which terrestrial and aerial-based platforms interact to coordinate the application of kinetic force and its global extension into an ‘everywhere war’ (Gregory 2011) that seeks ‘control without occupation’ (Weizman 2007: 239). In this attempt to control, Grayson (2016: 174) contends:

the ability to govern from the air with surveillance capabilities and precision weapons systems that target illegitimate forms of life have perversely been invested with a humanitarian legitimacy not granted to other forms of combat or armed coercion.

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<sup>1</sup> For example Adey (2010); Adey et al (2011); Anderson (2011); Bishop (2011); Graham (2004); Gregory (2010); and Saint-Amour (2011).

<sup>2</sup> We are thankful to a reviewer for drawing our attention to this tension.



This perception is underpinned by a belief that drones and their associated communication networks are 'key contributors to battlespace awareness' of the horizontal plane from the vertical, providing myriad benefits (US Department of Defence 2013: 23). As the US Department of Defence has argued (2010: 6):

These technologies will permit order-of-magnitude improvements in lethality by enhancing the accuracy and precision of information provided to the warfighter while also enhancing the accuracy of weapon systems and the survivability of forces. As a result, US forces will be able to conduct discrete, lethal attacks on selected targets with reduced risk and with high probability of success using fewer platforms and ordnance.

Relatedly, one US general has remarked that 'precision weapons are no good without precision coordinates' (Dettmer undated). Thus, if one believes in the drone's 'proven...capability to provide high fidelity, real-time intelligence and armed reconnaissance to battlefield commanders', one may improve one's knowledge of the spatial positions, and relationships, amongst objects/targets as well as their properties (Kowalski 2017: 2). The impetus for pre-emption characteristic of contemporary war-fighting shifts from intuitive suspicion towards the belief in an approaching visual omniscience that is understood to reveal what once would have gone unseen (Chamayou 2015: 38-42). This includes new predictive algorithms that are in development to help drone operators re-locate targets when they have disappeared from the visual field (Biddle 2017).

The drone and its sensor technologies are thus a conduit for the production of identifications that are the basis for 'signature strikes' conducted on targets understood to be exhibiting the signs of an 'insurgent pattern of life'. According to Chamayou (2015: 38), the past, present, and future oriented gazes produced through the drone which stem from its specific viewing capabilities, pilot training, and imbrication within a wider network of revelatory technologies, are motivated by a desire to produce synoptic viewing that combines multiple views into one totalizing view across time (by tracking/recording the historical, contemporaneous, and probable future movements of targets), and, with multiple deployments and new sensing technologies, potentially space.

Maurer (2016:2) extends Chamayou's analysis by defining drone's visual framing itself as a 'scopic regime' with specific '...ocular operations of capture...optical perspective on the target...visual sensing of the drone and its controller...target's range of vision, [and] representations of drones in social and aesthetic discourses'. For her, there are 'three scopic dimensions of the drone...: hypervisibility, visual immersion, and invisibility' (Maurer 2016: 3). Hypervisibility refers to the capacity of the drone to reveal what might not otherwise be seen from the ground or the air. Visual immersion refers to the technological and cultural practices that embed operators and other observers of camera feeds into its field of view. Invisibility is in relation to the viewer on the ground: the drone (through the actions of its operator) can remain invisible to the naked eye until such a time that a reveal is thought to be prudent. Thus, concurrent to the processes of aiming, ranging, tracking, and guiding identified by Bousquet (2017), Maurer (2016) draws attention to the important geopolitics that occurs in relation to who can see whom and who has the initiative to reveal.

By focusing on micro-practices Chamayou and Maurer provide compelling accounts of the visual dimensions of the drone; however, they miss the larger cultural politics of visibility at play. For example, both Kyle Grayson (2016: 153-158), and Derek Gregory (2011), have emphasised the importance of broader cultural overlaps such as longer-standing gazes shaped by gender relations, as well as the close

resemblance between the fields of view represented on drone viewing screens and in video games genres like first person shooters and map based strategy games. Similarly, interviews with drone operators have shown that the practice of viewing through the drone becomes invested with specific embodied sensations including awe, anger, titillation, nervousness, fatigue, and even boredom (Martin and Sasser 2010; Bowden 2013).

As Rose (2007: 10) suggests, vision always raises 'questions of social difference, social relations, and social power'; the view from the drone is no different in this respect. Although the ways of seeing required to make sense of images that are produced through viewing positions from the drone have been culturally embedded through their broader historical ubiquity in given social contexts (e.g., maps, aerial photography, personal experience of air travel, military/strategy video games, historical and contemporary art, films) it is not enough to say that culture preconditions viewers to understand that a certain kind of seeing is required via the recognition of similar properties in the images displayed. Such an argument erases the particularities of seeing, including how footage from drones is being used, the sorts of people interpreting it as truthful in specific contexts, and how given footage achieves its effects.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, audience analysis in visual culture studies has long ago reached the conclusion that not all viewers '...are willing to respond to the way of seeing invited by a particular image...' (Rose 2007: 11). Thus, modes of interpretation are activated (or solicited) through mechanisms beyond the visual field; images '...always make sense in relation to other things, including written texts and other images...' (Rose 2007: 11). With the view from the drone, it is the accompanying discourses circulated through official statements by state agents (Hayden 2016), media reports (e.g., *The Economist* 2011), and popular cultural artefacts like *Eye in the Sky* (2015) that focus on their visual capabilities, ability to facilitate precise kinetic activities, and their unambiguous field of view, all of which are predicated on the resonance of characteristics of Cartesian perspectivalism (i.e., precision requires accurate spatial ordering) and Baconian empiricism (e.g., capturing accurate details to distinguish those being targeted from others in the field of view). Thus, the clear overtures to Cartesian perspectivalism and Baconian empiricism that extend from the operator's gaze enabled by drone are important.

First, the drone mimics the desire in Cartesian perspectivalism for a disembodied immersion into the visual field from the perspective of an all-seeing eye. It is this disembodied 'god's eye' perspective that reveals the absolute positions of objects and thus invests them with particular meanings based on the visual confirmation of their coordinates in the battlespace. By pin-pointing the locations and orientations of objects, the drone offers the possibility of exercising control over them. It thus is a totalising view whose facticity derives from its claimed capacity to see all that needs to be seen in conjunction with other sensors in its network. Second, like the viewing subject at the heart of Cartesian perspectivalism, the way of seeing from the drone is a-historical; while objects being viewed might

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<sup>3</sup> Although drone sensor operators in the USAF receive 160 in-class and 36 simulator hours of training as part of their basic sensor training course, publicly available literature on pilot and sensor training does not indicate that trainees require specific courses of instruction to make sense of the visual field they perceive through the heads up display (HUD) unit that shows sensor footage--though one suspects there would be training on what particular objects may look like from this perspective (DoD 2013: 106; see also DoD 2013: 102-112). Emphasis is most often on using training to help operators to best utilise the capacities of the sensor technology (e.g., focal length) to capture what needs to be seen in a given situation. This requires high degrees of technical and inter-personal communication skills.

change, the principles of observation that place them into the field of view do not.<sup>4</sup> As such, determining the positions of objects within the field of view is understood to apply across time and space. Third, as in Baconian empiricism, there is also a preference for the collection and transmission of details that expose the real nature of what is being observed. A perceived value of drones is the provision to the viewer of a capability to accurately identify what appears in the field of view from their surfaces (e.g., insurgents from civilians). That claims about the capabilities enabled by the view from the drone draw from two scopic regimes without comment on the potential tensions, or even incompatibilities,, demonstrates how proponents seek to have their cake and eat it too.

#### IMAGE 4 ABOUT HERE

Here, Crary's (1992) reminder about the limits of the human observer's viewing capabilities is important. These limitations are often acknowledged; however there is a belief from users and designers that these are circumvented in real-time by technologically enhanced forms of seeing provided by various sensing apparatuses which rely on material components and coding to do so. However, the perception that one can capture a total field of view from a drone and its underlying components is also a problem. The volume of data being collected is becoming overwhelming. For example, a single drone equipped with ARGUS sensor technology collects 6000 terabytes of video data a day whose processing requires a separate on-the-ground super-computer (Anthony 2013). When object tracking is included, it is estimated that the system produces an Exabyte (1 million terabytes) of data a day (Anthony 2013). Similarly, with the ability to provide up to 65 different vantage points of a wider field of view, there is the potential to see more than can possibly be seen at any given time by human observers (see image 4). The immense volume of visual data also makes seeing retrospectively difficult given the immense size of the potential archive, makes seeing in the present potentially difficult given the range of specific views within the wider field of view, and thus makes future oriented vision a massive challenge if what needs to be seen is hidden in plain sight due to sensory overload. The human subject's viewing limitations thus spur the development of algorithms that might be used to identify particular phenomena within the visual field that would otherwise be missed and bring them to the attention of operators and analysts.

At the same time, Crary provides an impetus to turn the limits of seeing onto the drone itself-- implicitly the existing literature transposes the human viewing subject onto the drone (much like the rational actor model is transposed onto the state) without disaggregating the hidden ways of seeing that are being performed by cameras, sensors, computer chips, as well as the algorithms that transform machine vision into something that is visually sensible to human operators (Paglen 2016). It is also unable to account for how the global surveillance assemblage, of which drones are but one part, combines different media from visual, signal, and human intelligence, to compose a battlespace that is taken to be a unified visual field. There is also a need to account for what cannot be seen or can be seen but is ignored within these depictions (Gregory 2015). Even the limitations of technologies have to be factored

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<sup>4</sup> This recasts how the transcendental and universal is has been conceptualised in relation to Cartesian perspectivalism away from the viewing subject--i.e., 'the same for any human viewer occupying the same point in time and place'—to the proper principles that should guide that viewing subject (Jay 1988: 11). Thus, Jay's (1988: 11) response that Cartesian perspectivalism could be contingently shaped by 'the individual vision of distinct beholders, with their own concrete relations to the scene in front of them' misses different views could still share the same underlying principles about what is truthfully seen.

in such as mounting techniques and algorithms that have been developed to mitigate the effects of camera shake caused by turbulence. Moreover, it must not be forgotten that technologically enhanced forms of seeing are also highly embodied and mediated through the physiology of human operators and observers (Williams 2011).

Yet, despite these limitations, problems, and challenges, the operator's gaze from the drone is a perspective that remains confident that it can develop the capability to see all that needs to be seen, including past, present, and potential future relational positions of objects of interest, such that 'the exposure, fixation, and optical stabilization of threat and hazard' is maintained (Feldman 2005: 205). Its Cartesian qualities arise not just through its perspectivalism but in the maintenance of the separation of the viewing subject from that which it sees. Feldman (2005: 206) refers to this as the actuarial gaze whose geopolitical implications include: 'the prosthetic extension of the human sensorium...the consequent assignment of sensory capacity, power and judgement to machinic, automated and institutionalised instruments of perception; and the alignment of risk perception with the wish image'. Thus, invested with an ability to access the truth, an ability in part enabled by congruencies between the visual representations it produces and the conventions of key scopic regimes of modernity, the operator's gaze from the drone is invested with the ability to capture risks in their past, present, and future iterations, for the purposes of their mitigation.

In sum, the operator's gaze enabled by the drone relies on the spatial ordering aspects of Cartesian perspectivalism for the production of truth claims that can then be mobilised within the kill chain to unleash kinetic force. The claim that technologically generated visual omniscience is ever closer serves to reinforce those who see from the drone as privileged observers while reinforcing the legitimacy of the violence delivered from this perspective. Simultaneously, the influence of Baconian empiricism in the drone's visual field gives credence to the claim that its sensing technologies are able to reveal the true essence of targets, and non-targets, alike. Both scopic regimes produce a viewer who determines if/when to be seen and thus who enjoys an asymmetrical relationship of visibility with viewers below and the on-the ground eye-witness (Tidy 2017). Moreover, practices of control can be observed, analysed, and adjusted with a speed not previously possible at a distance from the battlespace. Actions emanating from claims of an approaching visual omniscience become contemporaneous with the gaze enabled by drone.

### **Looking back at the Drone: Challenging an Asymmetric Field of Visual Geo-Power**

If drone warfare is a mode of 'seeing without being seen' that reproduces the scopic regimes of modernity and asymmetries in relations of geo-power, it is important to discern the contours of its uneven visual field, define the ways in which it can remain unseen, and the audiences for whom it is not sensible (Feldman 1997: 40). The platforms themselves are not beyond visibility to global audiences. Photographs, videos, and information sheets on their capabilities, locations, and appearance are widely available for anyone with unimpeded access to the internet. For example, the *Drone Survival Guide* provides a catalogue of silhouettes of military drones from an on-the-ground perspective to help civilians in areas subject to drone activity identify them (see image 5).

IMAGE 5 ABOUT HERE

Despite reticence by states to either confirm or deny responsibility for kinetic events in certain theatres, advocacy groups, media, and think-tanks have been able to compile dossiers of probable strikes (Bureau

for Investigative Journalism 2011). Yet, as William Walters (2014a) and Oliver Kearns (2017) have noted, the vestiges of secrecy that surround drone warfare, the unevenness of what is made visible, how it is made visible, and contention over what counts as definitive evidence (of drone activity, strikes, and [war]crimes) constitute 'traces' or an 'absent presence', a spectral haunting that can elude evidentiary thresholds for politico-legal discourses, thus reproducing existing power asymmetries in world politics. Moreover, this spectral haunting catalyses technical contestation over their forms of materialisation when 'absent presences' are introduced into the evidentiary field. While some exceptions have been noted (Walters 2014b), regions in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Palestine, Iraq, Libya, and Somalia where drone war is being fought are not always easily accessible to outside observers, let alone the specific sites where drone strikes have taken place.<sup>5</sup> Yet, in contradistinction to representations in sympathetic media reports, lands beneath the drone are not remote or unpopulated areas. One initiative that attempted to show what existed prior to strikes was Dronestagram by James Briddle which posted Google Earth images of RPA strike sites online (see image 6). However, these images did little to challenge the ability of authorities to establish a narrative that becomes the baseline for discussions.

IMAGE 6 ABOUT HERE

Moreover, the aesthetic is very similar to the abstract battlespace of contemporary droning that underpins militarised representations of war-fighting. It provides the disembodied and fixed view of Cartesian perspectivalism that traditionally extracts an order out of a fluctuating (geopolitical) environment. It also implicitly draws upon the norms of Baconian empiricism by providing a descriptive account of the visual field that is assumed to hold true regardless of the perspective of the observer. Similarly, while advanced geospatial investigations to uncover drone strikes that are undertaken by organisations like the Goldsmith's Institute for Forensic Architecture are stunning in their technological sophistication and aesthetic presentation, they again must work within existing scopic regimes--and their associated techniques—in attempts to invert the gaze upwards towards the drone.

To materialise the spectre of the drone and transform drone warfare from an 'absent presence' into a 'present presence', proposals have been made under the auspices of the United Nations in the last decade that attempt to initiate the appearance of the drone within the visual field. We will focus on one case in particular that is illustrative of the influence of the scopic regimes of modernity.

In 2012, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Counter-Terrorism (Ben Emmerson QC) argued that states should be forced to release footage from strikes to independent assessors in order to verify the legality of such attacks. He was reported as intimating that 'while it remains nigh on impossible for observers to establish the truth on the ground in many of areas, each strike is visually recorded and videos could be passed to independent assessors'. He argued:

We can't make a decision on whether it is lawful or unlawful if we do not have the data. The recommendation I have made is that users of targeted killing technology should be required to subject themselves, in the case of each and every death, to impartial investigation. If they do not establish a mechanism to do so, it will be my recommendation that the UN should put the mechanisms in place through the Human Rights Council, the General Assembly and the Office of the High Commissioner (quoted in Judd 2012).

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<sup>5</sup> Humanitarian organisations have noted that the latter can be due to local authorities or insurgent groups restricting access to sites.

While the footage could be valuable for investigations, it is the primacy given to it that is unhelpful. The cameras—a partial perspective rendered through a technical assemblage of electronics, algorithms, and digital transposition—are presented as being able to provide definitive evidence to an observer of what has transpired in an extremely dynamic environment. It invites spectators to be drawn into a view produced through the drone, to submit to a technological hubris, to accept that it reveals the world as it is/was, rather than represents a world to us from a partial perspective. It permits an acceptance that the ‘fog of war’ can be overcome from a vertical vantage point that is mediated through technology that seeks to enhance the field of view in particular ways, for particular purposes, while ignoring that even outside of direct combat, the world does not readily reveal unmediated verity. Thus, this proposal contained the most limiting aspects of Cartesian perspectivalism and Baconian empiricism in an attempt to invert the gaze of the drone. From Cartesian perspectivalism it is the reliance on geometric abstraction in the service of supposedly neutral (or a-political) order(er). From Baconian empiricism it is the assumption that one can capture the material essence of objects that will hold regardless of one’s vantage point.

But beyond these practical or technical issues is a bigger problem. The tactic of emphasising the truth telling properties of footage from the drone is underpinned by the same assumption of visual omniscience— that is, at the pivotal moment, an unseen observer from above can clearly see all that needs to be seen by deploying the right technologies to capture the truth of the visual field. This is what enables claims about the precision of drone warfare and the value of drone surveillance.

### **Contesting the Scopic Regimes of Modernity: Aesthetic Interventions**

Drones play a key role in the distribution of the sensible that governs contemporary counter-insurgency; that is by ‘establishing the modes of perception’ drone warfare contributes to ‘the places and forms of participation’ within which counter-insurgency is inscribed (Rancière 2006: 85). In doing so, as has been shown above, it engages with a (geo)politics that, ‘revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of space and possibilities of time’ (Rancière 2006: 13). Moreover, the *Dingpolitik* (Walters 2014a) of the drone shapes the ways in which droning registers in the politico-legal sphere. As a result, the drone is not only engaged in the practices of direct intervention that are a part of contemporary policing/counter-insurgency, but in the terminology of Rancière, it is also a part of the police. In *Dissensus* Rancière (2010: 36) argues that:

The essence of the police...lies in a certain way of dividing up the sensible. I call “distribution of the sensible” a generally implicit law that defines the forms of partaking by first defining the modes of perception in which they are inscribed...A partition of the sensible refers to the manner in which a relation between a shared common...and the distribution of exclusive parts is determined in sensory experience...[it] presupposes a distribution of what is visible and what is not, of what can be heard and what cannot.

Whereas scopic regimes establish the parameters for what may constitute a field of view and the information that can potentially be gleaned from it, distributions of the sensible influence what can be acknowledged as present within them; this acknowledgement encompasses both the recognition of a presence (material and/or representational) as well as possible meanings associated with that presence. What is at best muted, or at worst, not sensed at all beyond spaces subject to drone strikes and—in fairness—the ground control station, are the physical, mental, and material injuries and losses that are

incurred (Kearns 2017). Fields of view shaped by Cartesian perspectivalism may be able to position strikes, casualties, and damage but they are incapable of capturing meaning outside of their strategic calculus to order an 'abstract, quantitatively conceptualised space' (Jay 1988). Similarly, the use of signature strikes based on the observation of an insurgent pattern of life are underpinned by a Baconian empiricism whose threat identification has been liberalised, constricting possibilities for meaning in battlespaces. Moreover, the boundedness of the broader geopolitical perspective that becomes instantiated in the drone strike, that is, the recognition that this provides *a* way of seeing, not *the* way of seeing, often escapes attention. How then might one contest the predominant distribution of the sensible produced through the drone and its associated scopic regimes? One place with potential answers is art that deploys a different aesthetic sensibility and scopic regimes to capture droning.<sup>6</sup> There are many contemporary artists and projects engaged with drones including Omar Fast, the #NotABugSplat campaign, James Briddle, Trevor Paglen, Hito Steyerl, and Lisa Barnard. We now turn to an illustrative case in which an imminent critique of Cartesian perspectivalism and Baconian empiricism co-exists alongside an alternative way of seeing that provincialises them.

IMAGE 7 ABOUT HERE

We argue that the prints of American-Pakistani artist Mahwish Chishti are examples of disruptions of the distribution of the sensible of drone warfare. She takes the figure of the drone and reflects it through the aesthetic code of trucks in Pakistan. Jamal J. Elias (2003: 192-194) has identified at least six motifs within this idiom: explicit religious symbols and images, talismanic objects that are for the purposes of protection, religiously loaded symbols, idealised elements of life, elements from modern life that are often symbolic of national social identity, and non-religious calligraphic programme—from humorous sayings, to poems, to stylised renditions of the names of trucking companies.

He argues that elaborate ornamental decorations on trucks in Pakistan are used to situate the truck owner/driver within a social geography (a depiction of home for the one who is rarely home) while religious and talismanic motifs provide symbolic protection of personhood and livelihood (Elias 2003: 199). Thus, the images are not merely decorative; rather they may also provide truck drivers with a sense of safety and security.

In an interview about the inspiration and aims of her project, Chishti (2016) has stated:

My visit to Pakistan in 2011 inspired my recent body of work. I am creating formal paintings that depict contradictions and irony within its pictorial coding. Starting from a silhouette of an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle, I paint colourful folk 'truck art' imagery on these war machines to give them a second skin that opens a dialogue about Pakistani culture. These paintings are accompanied by culturally loaded text. Poetic expressions in combination with stark iconography give birth to a new visual language. By applying photo-transferred images from Pakistani print media and layering it with traditional miniature painting, I challenge the grotesque reality of modern warfare. I am interested in the juxtaposition of terror with the representation of cultural beauty.

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<sup>6</sup> There is a long tradition in Western art of challenging the scopic regimes underpinning militarism from Goya's (1814) *El tres de mayo de 1808 en Madrid* to John Heartfield's *Hurrah, Die Butter ist alle!* (1935) to Picasso's (1937) *Guernica* to Martha Roselers (1967-1972) *Balloons!* For more, see Cork (1994) and Brandon (2012).

Chishty's art explicitly fuses an object (the drone) with an aesthetic sensibility rich with symbolism. While the symbolic significance of every feature represented in the images is too rich too detail in full, one sees the repetition of key icons and symbols Ellias (2003) identified as staples of truck decoration including eyes (to ward off evil intentions), chukar partridges, script, hearts, and stars (see image 7). The use of colour, including bright turquoises, oranges, yellows, greens, and reds, draws upon a palette and colour combinations that are in stark contrast to the blacks and greys usually associated with the contemporary battlefield and its machinery of violence (Guillaume et al 2016).

These overtures to the symbolic, the haptic quality to the images reminiscent of the Baroque, provide an imminent critique of Cartesian perspectivalism and Baconian empiricism. Their differences in relation to usual representations of the drone may require a recalibration to make sense of what is being seen in relation to expectations that may be held about what representations of a drone should look like. The profiles of the drone themselves are not replicas of the real object nor does one sense that this is the aim; there is distortion of the visual image in relation to the object being depicted; whether from the presentation of a ground-up vantage point, to as of yet unrealised machinic combinations. Therefore beyond evaluations of their beauty, as with the Baroque, these images reveal 'the conventional rather than natural quality of "normal" specularly' in relation to the drone (Jay 1988: 17). In doing so, they draw attention to how our ways of seeing, and from where we see, can define and give meaning to objects of interest.

In challenging the 'grotesque reality of modern warfare', by adorning the drone with what will likely be perceived by western audiences as an exotic aesthetic code, the unadorned drone is also rendered provincial. Rendering the unadorned drone provincial, in turn, opens the possibility for other aspects, like its claim to potential visual omniscience, to also be understood as a product of cultural presuppositions rather than universal truths.

What avenues then are opened by Chishty's art to further provincialise the scopic regimes of modernity? If the aporia of vision is that what is seen is reliant on what cannot be seen—i.e., the invisible distinguishes the visible--Nils Bubandt et al (2017) suggest that while this dynamic may be central to the scopic regimes of western modernity, there are other ways to negotiate it. They focus on the concept of *al-ghayb* within Islam which refers to the hidden, the unseen, and the invisible which co-constitutes the visible rather than serving as its outer limit. It includes those parts of reality that are covered by other visible objects, phenomena that by their nature cannot be perceived (e.g. different spiritual planes or temporal points like past and future), as well as anything that is blocked from view by one's perspective (Drieskens 2006; Mittermaier 2011; Suhr 2013 referenced in Bubandt et al 2017: np). *Al-ghayb* within Sufi traditions is also important for understanding 'jinn, angels, magic, the evil eye, and omens' (Bubandt et al 2017: np)

Thus, the symbols on Chishty's drones foreground the constitutive power of the invisible, perhaps most directly with those associated with magic and spirit worlds, but also, by extension, the mutually constitutive role of invisibility in the technological production of the visual field of drone warfare. But this remark should not be taken as the deployment of Orientalist tropes about the rationality of western modernity versus the mysticism of its alternatives. Rather, as Bubandt et al (2017) contend, bringing the mystical into the visual field can challenge 'not only the monopoly of modern science and rationality of visibility, but also the authorities in the very context from which they grew'. Thus, invisibility is not necessarily something to be overcome through technology or information sharing, it is precisely what co-constitutes what is seen by drone operators, human rights organisations, local authorities, people



on the ground, and global audiences. There is always the imperceptible, that over which we cannot be certain, in everything we see. The political question then is whether to fear this invisibility, and fall prey to a Xeno's paradox in seeking to eradicate it, or to accept its presence as a reminder to be more circumspect about claims we make about what constitutes a visual field and what may be present in it.

## **Conclusions**

The scopic regimes of modernity are an important concept for analysing power dynamics in international relations in general, and within the sites examined by the visual turn more specifically. By historicising ways of seeing, we contended that directing attention to the scopic regimes of modernity deepens the understanding of how practices of seeing, representing, and positioning are linked to systems of knowledge and power that influence the production of truth in world politics. Our argument in this regard is not that the view from the drone leads everyone to see the battlespace in the exact same way. Rather, in relation to drone warfare, the scopic regimes of modernity provide the basis for a consensus that there is a visual field that is produced through the drone which potentially contains relevant information regarding the spatial relations conjoining those things represented in it and also potentially allows one to make substantive distinctions amongst what may be present—though the degree to which this is possible is contentious. Therefore, taking the role and influence of the scopic regimes of modernity and their alternatives seriously deepens our understandings of what is seen, how it is seen, by whom it is seen, and what are identified as the limitations of the viewing subject.

At the danger of deploying a mixed metaphor, scopic regimes have resonance beyond the 'visual turn' and can help deepen the analysis of other important concerns in international relations scholarship. For example, the scopic regimes of modernity can provide additional insights into a range of issues from the verification practices of arms control to the ways in which visual evidence is produced and presented in international legal cases, to the ways in which complex vivacious international issues like climate change, financial crises, or cyber-attacks are visually represented. Thus, there is a pressing need to engage with the influence of scopic regimes at the micro-level in terms of particular assemblages that produce specific ways of seeing as well as how these are imbricated at the macro-level with more general scopic regimes that produce broader ways of seeing and observers, whether these are associated with modernities (including pre and post), alternative modernities, or emerging forms of machine seeing that increasingly shape our political worlds and sensibilities. It also requires that the visual turn in IR, and scopic regimes, be decolonised. As Christopher Pinney (2006: 139) has argued, the study of visual culture more generally has been 'insufficiently anthropological.' Scopic regimes are not uniquely western, though those we have examined here in drone warfare have been predominantly entrenched within western spheres of cultural influence. For example, it has been proposed that there are viewing practices in Japan encompassing 'extramissive vision' where a subject is joined to a distant object (Elkins 2003: 119 ; see also Sasaki 1996: 170) and that the Khmer Rouge's scopic regime centred on the 'devastation' of vision (Ly 2003). To engage with these different ways of seeing will require the development of new visual methodologies and methods that neither take the visual field, its content, or observers for granted. By doing so, international relations will be better equipped to answer the question 'how does the visual shape the political?' across a range of topic areas, furthering the understanding of how the sites, and sights, of world politics interact in the production of truth and power.

As a first step, in this paper we demonstrated how drone warfare is made possible—in part— by an assemblage of technology, scopic regimes, and ways of seeing that come together in its commissioning.

By engaging with the scopic regimes of modernity, we were able to show the gaze produced through the drone is historically situated within longer-standing ways of seeing. We then pointed to an art project that suggests that the truth of drone warfare is more complicated than what can be perceived by views possible from the drone and different ways of seeing informed by alternative scopic regimes of modernity. The art of Mahwish Chishty engages with drone warfare through the mobilisation of a different set of symbolic markers: for example, religious and talismanic imagery, colour, and size. As Elias (2003: 197) notes in relation to aesthetic elements, 'they are perceived—and as David Chidester [1992] has so succinctly paraphrased a central idea of Paul Ricoeur—perception gives rise to symbols, and symbols give rise to thought' (Elias 2003: 197). Thus, in the spirit of Stuart Hall's (1997: 2) observation that culture—and cultural hegemony—is in part constituted by 'people interpreting meaningfully what is around them, and 'making sense' of the world in broadly similar ways', we have sought to draw attention to the scopic regimes of modernity that are contributing to how drone warfare is being perceived and made meaningful.

Chishty's images call into question the claim to visual omniscience made possible by the scopic regimes of modernity underpinning drone warfare by demonstrating that there are other ways of seeing it that do not neatly fit into the epistemological realism underpinning Cartesian perspectivalism and Baconian empiricism. That being said, it is important not to overlook that all scopic regimes make assumptions about the viewing subject and can influence their viewers—whether by omission or commission—into seeing in some ways and not others, leading to political consequences. Therefore, one cannot assume the efficacy of different scopic regimes or their moral value independent of context. Our argument is that by showing how to disrupt ordinary sensory orders structuring a visual field, Chishty's work hints at ways that this can be extended to associated political orders and the practices that underpin them. Her prints contest aspects of the contemporary politics of aesthetics whereby distributions of the sensible (both in terms of what is perceived and how this feeds into our conceptions of common sense) can be reconfigured. They also recast where we might see the politics of international relations taking place. Such contributions are not insignificant.

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### **Images:**

Images 1-3

All are in the public domain.

Image 4

From Extremetech.com: <https://www.extremetech.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/9a16a33e-462e-4149-a9a8-5f2e11c2c6b6.Full.jpg>

[Accessed 26/04/2017]

Image 5

From Drone Survival Guide: <http://www.dronesurvivalguide.org/photo3.jpg>  
[Accessed 26/04/2017]

Image 6

From Dronestagram <http://instagram.com/p/veUTzwLBxx/>  
[Accessed 26/04/2017]

Images 7: From <http://www.mahachishty.com/work#/drone-art-series/>  
[Accessed 26/04/2017]